DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 617 JC 880 221

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TITLE The Student-Athlete in the Classroom: Developmental Issues Affecting College Athletes and Their Impact on Academic Motivation and Performance.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Symposium on Developmental/Remedial Education (11th, Albany, NY, April 17-19, 1988).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Athletes; *College Athletics; Community Colleges; Student Attitudes; *Teacher Role; *Teacher Student Relationship; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students

ABSTRACT

If college instructors are to work effectively with student-athletes, they must be aware of the career goals, identity as athletes, lifestyle, and educational attitudes of these students and develop appropriate strategies for facilitating their growth and maximizing their learning experiences. The college athletic environment, with its rigid schedule, lack of opportunity for expanded social interaction, strong emphasis on authority figures, and directive approach to leadership, encourages student-athletes to see the world in dichotomous terms of right and wrong. For the athletes, the relativistic academic world presents difficulties, since they spend much of their time in a world that overlooks or even consciously discourages ethical and intellectual development. Efforts by teachers to encourage students to see the connections between different disciplines, to look at material from a number of different perspectives, to develop self-awareness, to accept and value other opinions may be particularly threatening to student-athletes. Other areas of potential dissonance between students and teachers are conflicting perceptions of the teacher's role and preferences regarding testing. To work effectively in the academic environment, athletes must learn to transfer their existing skills for planning and goal setting into the classroom, and to seek the links between the academic and athletic worlds. (EJV)

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The Student-Athlete in the Classroom: Developmental Issues Affecting College Athletes and Their Impact on Academic Motivation and Performance

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Student-athletes present many difficulties for college instructors. While instructors want to give all their students the background and skills that will help them to do their best in college, they are often temperamentally quite far away from the concerns of student-athletes, and the world that they inhabit is foreign to most instructors. Student-athletes also often present instructors with rather frustrating and off-putting behaviors, and the average instructor who has little experience with this group of students may be suspicious of how different these students' agendas are from the instructor's own. As a result, many instructors either choose not to be too concerned with these students or cannot bridge the gap between these students' orientation to education and their own.

However, if faculty are going to work effectively with these students and maximize their academic experiences, it is important that they be aware of these students' academic and career goals, the world that they live in, the developmental difficulties that this world may contribute to, and the attitudes toward classes, instructors, and work that may result from this lifestyle. Ultimately, with some background knowledge of a rather specialized group of students, instructors must develop strategies for facilitating these students' growth and maximizing their learning experiences, as they would with any other group of students, especially at this time when the position of college athletes within the

academic community is receiving some much needed scrutiny.

While a college education may go far beyond vocational training and have an inherent value of its own, there is a strong career preoccupation among college students. For most students, however, there is a logical connection between the academic skills that they are learning in college and their future career goals. However, for the collegiate student-athlete population, this relationship between the academic purpose of college and these students' career goals becomes immensely complicated and presents some issues that have a far-reaching impact on how these students engage themselves with the academic demands of college and how instructors respond to them.

First and foremost, student-athletes quite often also see college as a step toward their eventual career goals, particularly under the current system, where collegiate sports can really be labelled pre-professional (Green and Rosenberg, 1985). However, their conception of career may present difficulties. While members of the educational community not connected to sports may look dubiously on the chances for successful involvement in professional sport as a career, research shows that these concerns are not shared by high school and college athletes, since studies on the high school and college levels indicate that a significant percentage of student athletes believe that they have reasonable chances of becoming professional athletes, even if

they are non-starters on their high school teams (Lee, 1983) or attend Division III institutions, which do not grant athletic aid packages (Blann, 1985). In cold contrast to these numbers, NCAA statistics from 1981 reveal that less than 2 percent of athletes participating in high school sports will become pros, and less than 1 percent of those who participate in college sports are ever successful in NBA or NFL careers (NCAA, 1981).

Despite these daunting statistics, a very large number of male adolescents are apparently unaware of how slim their chances for success actually are or choose to see themselves as exceptions who will beat the odds. With this mindset, they come to college with very different conceptions of their own identity than many other students. While non-athletes are preparing for careers and new, adult identities, successful high school athletes come to college with a highly developed sense of themselves as athletes. They have a label to define themselves by, and coming to college often reinforces the importance and value of this label for them. While most students are forced to confront the question of "Who am I?" as a normal part of working through the task that Erikson calls Identity vs. Role Confusion (Erikson, 1959), athletes have an answer to this question.

This is closely related to the concept of identity foreclosure, where an individual makes a premature commitment to a career or ideology without giving him or herself the

opportunity to perceive other options (Petitpas, 1978). Athletes have often foreclosed on the idea of athletic careers by the time they reach college, and little in the college athletic lifestyle encourages them to move away from this view of the world.

Even if both athletes and non-athletes see college as a step on the road to their career goals, the relationship that non-athletes see between academics and careers is missing for student-athletes. The academic world is peripheral to their other role as athletes, where most of their identity is focused. Unfortunately, this quite often puts them in a position of academic schizophrenia, where they have two completely separate sides to their lives, often with catastrophic consequences (Rhatigan, 1984; Zingg, 1982). While instructors expect student-athletes to take their classes as seriously as their other students do, these students' main academic goal may be simply to do well enough to remain eligible, in order to continue their athletic participation. They may choose a major or state academic goals for the semester, but this is often more of an attempt to behave in a socially acceptable way than a decision that is firmly grounded in their own sense of self-concept.

This divided sense of the world is more of an issue for men that it is for women and is more pressing at Division I schools, in revenue-producing sports, than it is at Division III institutions. The difference between men's and women's

experiences may stem from the fact that men have traditionally had more legitimate possibilities for professional sports careers than women, so they may be able to continue their quest for the American dream of success through sport. while women may use sports as a means for getting into college but are usually aware of the need to prepare for alternative careers. To this point, this has probably been a blessing in disguise for many women athletes, forcing them out of the foreclosed identity of "athlete," but, as pressures in women's recruiting mount and women's professional sports continue to grow, the risk is there for women to confront many of the same difficulties traditionally addressed by men.

The college athletic lifestyle, at least at the Division I level, and in revenue producing sports, also encourages and reinforces a lifestyle that points athletes toward athletic careers and does little to focus them on the academic side of their college life or prepare them for non-athletic career options. Three aspects of the student-athlete's world are particularly important when viewed as triggers or preconditions for the developmental difficulties faced by athletes in the classroom.

First, anyone who works with college athletes knows about the time constraints that they face. After being asked to attend classes and perform adequately in the academic side of their lives, they may be required to spend up to six hours

on their athletic pursuits. In many cases, their preparation for classes can be cursory at best, even for those who come to college with good skills. Those students who come with weak skills are often unable to take the time for extra tutoring, even if they acknowledge their difficulties and desire to improve their skills.

The effects of time restrictions are more far-reaching than simply leaving little time for academic skill-building, however! Student-athletes have very limited opportunities to take part in non-athletic events, even if they are aware of these events taking place on campus. Also, these time constraints leave little opportunity for athletes to make significant social contacts outside of the athletic peer group. College offers most students an invaluable opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds and experience new outlooks on the world, but athletes, both by inclination and necessity, spend most of their time with other athletes, who share similar goals, priorities, and tensions. They are given the opportunity to maintain their foreclosed view of the world. This homogeneous peer group is further isolated by living conditions on many campuses that often segregate them further from the rest of the non-athletic community.

This strong reliance on others who are just like them is perhaps natural and understandable, but the reliance on teammates as the strongest reference group is complicated by

competition for playing time and praise from teammates and coaches. Athletes, more than almost any other group, are forced to be most intimate with the same individuals they have to compete with in a high-pressure situation that is closely linked to their self-esteem.

Finally, the college athletic system places a very strong priority on authority figures. Coaches have a formidable influence on athletes, both as positive role models and as disciplinarians and evaluators of performance and behavior, both on and off the field. While non-athletes use their college years to experiment with independence and are given the opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility and control over their lives, athletes' lives are externally controlled to the extent that there is little need for them to become responsible for their behavior and goals, and too much independence may actually be seen as a negative influence by coaches who are more concerned with the smooth functioning of their teams than with encouraging personal growth. This lifestyle puts student-athletes at the mercy of a highly functional and efficient system that can trigger serious developmental difficulties for these students, and these difficulties have far-reaching impacts in the classroom.

One of the most useful models to use to discuss the student athlete from a developmental perspective is William Perry's scheme of the ethical and intellectual development of

college students (Perry, 1971). Using Perry's model, athletes exhibit many of the characteristics of Dualistic thinking and live in a classic Dualistic environment. The college athletic environment, with its rigid schedule, little opportunity for expanded social interaction, strong emphasis on authority figures, and directive approach to leadership, encourages student-athletes to see the world in dichotomous terms of Right/Wrong, Good/Bad and to see authority figures as being able to provide them with clear direction and evaluation. There is also a clear connection between Dualism, identity foreclosure, and the concrete thinking stage of Piaget's cognitive model (Kurfiss, 1983).

In college, however, student-athletes are put in an environment where instructors perceive and present material Relativistically. For instructors, the Relativistic world makes sense, and teaching from this perspective encourages students to move along Perry's developmental continuum. For athletes, however, this environment and set of expectations presents difficulties, since they are asked to participate in this setting and simultaneously asked to spend much of their time in a world that overlooks or even consciously discourages the need for this kind of developmental movement. Their environment requires that they be constantly in a state of rather unhealthy disequilibrium.

One of the roles of the developmental educator may be facilitating student growth and movement along Perry's

continuum, but these students often present instructors with behaviors and attitudes that seem to sabotage development, both in terms of skill acquisition and personal growth. The gap between students' behavior and instructors' expectations may be broader with student-athletes than with many other groups of students and may also be more accepted or even socially sanctioned than with other students. All too often, there is a tacit acceptance of the "dumb jock" label. At this point, it becomes important to look at the areas where student-athletes are most at odds with the norms of college academics and become aware of the two different agendas that are functioning in the classroom so that more effective strategies for these students can be developed.

First of all, there is a clear difference between the way instuctors would like to encourage students to perceive classes and course materials and the way that they are prepared to perceive them. Encouraging students to be actively involved in learning as a behavior is something that goes far beyond simply acquiring new skills and correcting their existing ones, and this has been the goal of many of the programs that stress learning across the curriculum, where the emphasis is on holistic learning and seeing the connections between different disciplines and different ways of "seeing" the world.

However, Dualistic students, and particularly Dualistic student-athletes, come to college with a very different

agenda. While many students see their academic experiences as a chance to develop a personal sense of direction and identity, athletes do not put a high premium on academic self-expression, since they already express themselves in a physical way that fits in with their sense of identity. While most instructors would not see education as an introspective, passive pursuit, athletes probably perceive it this way, and the introspective aspects of education are not essentially compelling to students who already have a very different area of self-expression.

Holistic, across the curriculum learning, or even something as basic as stressing the very natural connection between reading and writing, asks students to look at material from a number of different perspectives. This is particularly important in writing classes, since much academic writing asks students to be able to adopt different personas and think about the needs of different audiences. Attempting to shift personas and look at different sides of an issue may be very difficult for these students, since Dualistic learners will not perceive the need to understand different sides of an issue and consequently will not realize the validity of different personas or the existence of audiences with different needs than their own.

Attempting to shift personas may be extremely difficult and may involve a sense of loss of control or identity, since athletes who have foreclosed on their athletic identities

have particularly rigid personas. The academic setting is especially devalued for these students. They already have a low sense of academic identity, and instructors ask them for a self-awareness and understanding of processes and possibilities that they don't have. Their compartmentalized view of their own experiences makes it hard for them to accept or see the value of holistic education, which looks for similar themes and connections between ostensibly different areas. Their own lives, rigidly split and dichotomized, do not fit with this model.

Peer groups and peer response have become increasingly popular techniques for getting students to accept and value the diversity of opinions and perspectives in the classroom. From a developmental standpoint, peer response, role playing, brainstorming, and problem-solving encourage students to see this diversity and move away from a foreclosed, Dualistic worldview. Ultimately, the hope is that students will gradually use these experiences as ways of building a sense of responsibility and ownership for their larger educational experiences.

It would seem that writing as a process would at least be a concept that would have meaning for athletes, who are always involved in the process of honing their athletic skills. However, spending time on a process and seeing it as something that merits that time and attention involves seeing that process as a goal that has validity, and, for athletes,

writing (and most other academic pursuits) is not an activity that they feel much ownership for.

The world of the athlete is task-oriented, not reflective, and the class that asks for peer response and a high level of involvement may also be a frightening environment, particularly since athletes live in a coach dominated world where their own decisions have very little importance or are not even considered. Starting lineups, plays, strategies, and schedules are determined by someone else, not by a group of peers, so being asked to respond to and make judgments about material may be skills that they have never developed.

Athletes may also segregate themselves in the classroom, which is something that is very frustrating to instructors who want to encourage a unified class, but it is in line with athletes' restricted world view and strong sense of group purpose. They will hardly ever be leaders in the classroom, even if they are comfortable in leadership positions within sports. There is also, quite often, a discomfort between athletes and non-athletes, and athletes may be reluctant to put their sense of identity and beliefs up for scrutiny before students who have very different perspectives on the world. Their high profile and public position on campus and the "dumb-jock" label may be part of the foreclosed identity that these students have already accepted for themselves.

While interactive classroom modes that stress the Multiplistic world are uncomfortable for athletes (and for many other students, at least at the start), they may be very willing to see very traditional, closed-ended activities such as lectures or worksheets as teaching devices that have a great deal of validity. While we may attempt to move away from overtly formulaic teaching practices, from the Dualistic learner's perspective, worksheets and other very limited experiences are measurable, clear-cut, practicable skills, rather like shooting free-throws. They may perceive these activities as not particularly pleasant but necessary--something they can do and then see results that are easily evaluated. Very likely, from their perspective, these are the kinds of activities that should go on in the classroom.

Another area where instructors may perceive their part in the educational process differently from Dualistic student-athletes is their own role in the classroom. If most instructors have reached some level of Perry's Relativistic stage, they are able to see education, and their own part in it, as a non-authoritarian, non-directive process, working from the model of the classroom as a community of learners, with the teacher as resource figure rather than authority figure. However, this is a difficult way for athletes to perceive teachers. After often having been only marginally successful in their academic careers to date, they may be naturally resistant to instructors as a group, and especially

to those who do not fit into an authoritarian mode.

This is further complicated by the fact that instructors do not have the same authority or importance as coaches for most athletes. No matter what they may like to think, instructors do not evaluate these students in an area of their lives that has a great deal of importance to them, so they are in a low power position. By choosing to lower their position further, by decentering their authority in the classroom, they may become such unusual or peripheral figures that they are treated with suspicion or taken advantage of, which is probably one of the great fears of many teachers who come to work with this group of students for the first time. Approaching these students with kindness and acceptance may also provoke a different reaction than with other students. The coaching world does not usually put a high priority on kindness as a trait, since it is in opposition to athletes' and coaches' perceptions of authority and strength. Athletes do not perceive reassurance as an appropriate response from authority figures.

Evaluation of work is the third important area of dissonance between instructors and student-athletes and other Dualistic learners. Objective tests, which ask for clearly defined responses, and such subjects as math, which offer rules and formulas, fit with Dualistic students' conceptions of how learning should be tested and evaluated, and these are the kinds of work that also take the least amount of time and

personal involvement, making them attractive to student-athletes whose attention and time are spent on other things. Papers and essay exams ask for a much deeper involvement from students and require a much more in-depth knowledge of material, so they present difficulties for these students who do not have a strong sense of how to combine ideas and conceptualize arguments.

Evaluation of more subjective assignments also opens up problems for these students, since the language used for evaluation of essay exams and papers rarely splits the world into the dualities that these students are comfortable with. Particularly in writing classes, holistic responses to assignments are given in a completely different language than these students are comfortable or familiar with. After reading the evaluation or listening to the teacher, the response is almost inevitably, "OK, so what do you want me to do now?" This immediately pushes the instructor back into the position of directive authority figure and makes the paper or assignment a "product" rather than a continuing "work in process," which is a much more productive way of concpetualizing the writing process. Long narrative responses are also generally perceived as being, first, all critical, and, second, out of place in the world of physical response and few words that is the model presented by coach-athlete relationships.

This discussion may have seemed to stress the areas

where athletes are deficient or have foreclosed themselves out of the academic community. However, athletes do have skills and capabilities that can work very effectively in the academic setting, if they can be taught how to channel these skills. If there are two areas that are most important for instructors who work with these students to be aware of, they are the transfer of existing skills and linking the academic and athletic worlds.

First of all, athletes should be encouraged to transfer their goal setting and planning skills from sport to the classroom. Athletes have a great deal of facility in setting objectives in the athletic sphere of their lives, but this is another skill that they tend to compartmentalize and do not perceive as something that can be effective in their academic lives. Within the classroom, this can easily be done by teaching goal setting and planning skills to show the connection with skills these students have already developed and then making them an integral part of academics, either through assignment planning sheets or contract learning, which is an extremely valuable strategy for developing a sense of academic responsibility and ownership.

Communication and team-building are the other extremely important components of any system for taking athletes out of the fringes of the academic community and trying to move them into the mainstream of the academic environment. Athletes, as a group, are extremely loyal to teams, coaches, and

friends, and this is an area that the academic community often overlooks. The personal student-teacher relationship with these students, while it is very different than with other groups of students, is one of the most fruitful areas to develop, and both sides can profit and learn something from this interaction

One very practical strategy is to encourage interaction with athletes and to attempt to open lines of communication with coaching staffs and athletic advisors. This is a relatively untapped area, since many instructors are just as susceptible to the closed compartment view of athletic-academic relations as athletes are. Encouraging a sense of connection between the academic and athletic parts of their lives and building a team for students to work with (both as support and as a means of assessment and evaluation) are excellent ways to increase the instructor's sense of power when working with these students and to increase their sense of responsibility for their performance and behavior in the classroom.

Conferencing and giving verbal feedback to assignments instead of written responses may also build a sense of personal connection and break down the antipathy toward written evaluation that these students have often developed after years of negative evaluation. This circumvents the barrier of print that these students feel and allows the instructor to deal with the "OK, so what do you want me to

do next?" mentality in person. Individual and small group conferences can also be ideal settings for introducing new perspectives on material and breaking down some of the athlete/non-athlete polarities that can impede interaction and growth in the larger classroom setting, and they can also be excellent settings for reinforcing the academic goal setting and planning behaviors that are introduced in class. If the role of the developmental educator goes beyond simply imparting information, one of the most valuable things instructors can offer to students is modeling of effective and successful academic behaviors and classroom socialization, which is an area that these students are often very much in need of.

Finally, it is also important to acknowledge and respect the skills that these students do bring with them to the classroom. Acknowledging that these are basic areas that students are comfortable in does not mean settling for having them remain at this level, but some basic success is invaluable for building a sense of confidence, and even the most rudimentary skills that these students address with competency will be the foundation for the more advanced work that they will have to do later in their academic careers. Success in short assignments can also do much to get around the foreclosed sense of "the dumb jock" who has nothing to contribute to the classroom. If these students are not praised for what they can do, we marginalize their presence

even more.

It does not appear that the institution of college athletics is going to change radically in the near future, since a brief overview of literature about collegiate sports over the last fifty years quickly shows that the same issues have been recycling through the academic community without much variation. However, if the institutional hierarchy of athletics does not seem to change, the stakes for students who go through this system and come out unprepared for later life become progressively higher. This gives us the rest of the educational community a heavy responsibility.

Even within the existing system, these students should be given the opportunity to develop successful skills and behaviors and give them the tools necessary to move away from the foreclosed athletic identities that many of them have chosen. This is a huge task that instructors can not be held even primarily responsible for, but they can participate in it and give these students an opportunity to develop a responsibility to themselves by being aware of the world that they live in and actively addressing some of the barriers to their development that keep them on the fringes of the academic world. Ultimately, it is the college instructor's role to facilitate the growth of these students just as he or she would any other group, with the added knowledge that instructors are part of an educational system that leaves this particular group of students unempowered. Empowerment

is one of the most far-reaching gifts that can be given to these students, and the developmental educator has a rare chance to do this.

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